

First NH State House

The Consultant U-Shaped Roundtable

April 16, 2012 Kimball Jenkins Estate, Concord, NH

9:00am-4:00pm

In Attendance: Laura Black (DHR), Blake Hayes (CVG), Christine Miller Cruie (CHRS, Inc.), Jason Bailey (TMS Architects), John Merkle (TMS Architects), James Stevens (ConsultEcon, Inc), Beth Muzzey (DHR), Deb Gagne (DHR), Peter Michaud (DHR)

Laura opened the meeting at 9:09 am with a welcome to all participants and a brief overview of the day's activities and flow. **The question to be answered by today's meeting is:**

Based on the project's gathered data and public comments, what best use/outcome/plan should the State of New Hampshire proceed with to share New Hampshire's First State House with its citizens and visitors?

Key Factors to Answer the Question:

- Who has recently expressed interest in participating in the project, and in what form?
- Public comments: public meetings; online surveys; news articles/editorials; public interest in general; other
- State Responsibility & Stewardship: Historic Preservation best practices, storage, distribution, etc.
- Reminder of the economic focus of the EDI grant: discuss ways the recommended option(s) could support economic development.

Consultant's Final Recommendations Overview:

James; ConsultEcon Inc: We looked at the First State House to look at the economic viability of project options and economic impacts of preservation statewide. In looking at the interpretation report, the first two scenarios are not viable. Three, four, and five are really the most economically feasible. The first two scenarios suffer from being an old fashioned representation of preservation practice and do not follow current philosophy on the treatment of historic properties. The end product was also not a sufficiently sized attraction to hold its own as a major museum. They are predicated on the notion that an organization exists (especially for four and five) to make them viable. Either an organization needs to be created or an existing organization needs to broaden its reach. For the permanent exhibit, an organization like the NH Historical Society or the current New Hampshire State House is needed. A traveling exhibit would be great, but needs to be modest in scale. This could be coupled with an online exhibit as well. The NH Historical Society curator expressed some general interest in the resource as a statewide resource. Discover Portsmouth Center would also be a possible location for a temporary exhibit. But it will take resources to help make what ever happens happen.

Blake; Cherry Valley Group: It is difficult to look at best interpretive practice without looking at the economic numbers as well. The inherent preservation problem with the reconstruction scenarios is that you would be placing a highly conjectural presentation. Also, in looking at the numbers associated with the most popular historic museum attractions in the region, the numbers would not support such an interpretive program as a reconstructed State House. It is a staff intensive activity that relies on a constant need to produce innovative programming. The exhibit is a reasonable activity but it is a capital intensive cost and without a willing partner to take on the product it would be difficult to complete. The idea behind the civic engagement project is that you would blend an exhibit component with a modern use with current technology. It gives the artifact purpose that can engage people by using the object as a tool. By using digital technology, you can use the object to fill current needs in an exciting way.

Christine; CHRS, Inc.: You can conserve anything, but you need to understand what you are fixing, what the costs are, and is it worth it. Fixing all the bits so they could go back together as a building is not recommended. It is no longer a building, it's an object.

John; TMS Architects: The building is not the story but the events associated with it are. There's not enough here to make it worth rebuilding. The story of Colonial government can't be told by the existing materials.

Jason; TMS Architects: The digital model is misleading. The components in the model are in a zero-gravity digital world. In real life the building parts would not stand and extensive reworking of the joinery and framing would be needed.

Comments Made to the Above:

James: Museums are more about the activity then the objects. The programming is important.

Blake: When you start to put pieces together, you need to make something that is discernable to the human eye. What we have left would need extensive additions and alterations to be reconstructed. We can do anything but it has to be so important with compelling desire to do it.

Beth: Before this was disassembled and put into a truck, we had a standing building. We now have something where everyone says we do not have a standing building. Did we, in effect, destroy the building when we put it in a truck? How do we summarize this in a report? We need to answer that.

John: We asked this question. The State House did not have a first floor when it was deconstructed and stored. The ground floor was gutted while the building stood on Court Street. This is a British building, we think that the people of Portsmouth did not care for the building after the Revolution and it deteriorated.

Who does care about it?

Blake: There was a group of people who came to speak for the building at the first public meeting but it was not clear what the purpose of the building would be.

James: The technical aspects of putting the building back together does not really tell the saga of the First State House, the changing preservation movement, civil engagement, etc. The interesting story is the preservation story. It has incredible amounts of meaning for a group of people, how do we inspire that meaning to a larger population and what is the best way to do this? How do we create meaning and what is the system of delivery for that meaning? The idea of a small traveling exhibition is very appealing for its impacts on the communities of NH. Statewide themes do not always resonate with local history groups whose focus is only local community history.

Blake: We need to make the connections with the local community in some way. If you are a pull model (open the door to an historic site and pull people in) it is harder to create meaning for individuals then it is when you are a push model (a traveling exhibit) that goes out into that person's community. Calling this a center instead of a museum excludes the notions carried by the word museum. You are creating something that is designed to push forward its mission and message. Utilizing this object in a way that would not be typical in a museum or preservation context is a leap that has not been really discussed.

James: The idea of making a piece of furniture takes materials with meaning and gives them a use but it also deals with the consumption of materials. We also talk about the issue of deaccession but have we ever accessioned the objects?

Blake: The public looks at this as a state owned resource and cutting it up will upset some and please others. People will care if we are doing the right or wrong thing.

Beth: It was purchased by the State of NH as real property and moved to Strawberry Banke. It would be interesting to look at the terms of that sale.

James: Reconstruction is prohibitively expensive. What is the State of New Hampshire's responsibility for this resource? Are there any resources available from the State of New Hampshire to support the ongoing reuse of the resource?

Beth: We would bring forward the plan through the capital budget process and see what the Legislature's interest is (considering a best time to put it forward and the economic situation as a State.)

Regardless of interpretation model, what will happen to the materials?

State curatorship, turn over to private entity, status quo. Cultural leanings away from money for curatorship is part of the story.

Blake: A proper storage facility is needed that can allow for proper access for study. It needs an accessible home if the State will be the owner of this object and take responsibility in perpetuity. There is also the option of "status quo." There are costs for care of this thing, either financial or other.

James: The story and its delivery are what important. It can stay in the trailer but what access do we have through exhibits, etc. It can fulfill the responsibility of providing access to the "materials" (Blake: That is a very museum view and would like to see us think beyond that.) We have capital funds for creating capital things and creating a center may not fit this model.

Beth: Why do centers get started? If we do not have the clarion call to create a center but are doing it based on an object, do we have a real need?

Blake: Yes, civic education and being a citizen of NH.

Blake: We have an object that might be a perfect symbol to launch such an educational agenda. There is a national organization that deals with such education. The Bar Association of NH is the state link for NH from this organization. Could this be a partner to stand this up as a symbol?

Beth: Would NH's current State House be the ideal building for this? The message of the current state house is that this is your house, the doors are not locked, and you can go in and find your government officials. Is there a question about community life that the current building does not tell?

Peter: Needs to be dynamic to children. The standing State House is already a "spokesperson" for civic education.

Blake: Using the resource symbolically to launch people in a public engagement with other resources.

Laura: Do children from the North Country participate in the State House tour?

Blake: You could take a story of state government and where it has resided in New Hampshire. It is a virtual portal or visitor's center.

Christine: If this were still a standing building, would we be having this conversation? If this was a building from a preservation standpoint, would it be considered "historic?" If not, it could have been torn down under the rules and regulations preservation operates under today. We are discussing it because it is a new situation.

Laura: There is so much history here associated with the resource, but that is true for any building.

James: Why can we not put "get rid of it" on the table?

Blake: Museums do not always look at the best object to add to their collection.

Beth: The state does not have a museum accession policy and usually takes things that people donate, not always with a plan for future storage, care and maintenance.

Jason: The project could look at the larger educational community including preservation programs from the college level.

Christine: From a standpoint of preservation programs, there are easier ways to that end. We have easier and better ways to teach this [conservation, preservation, building technology etc.] using standing resources. Under Section 106, would this resource be recognized as a resource?

A break was called at 10:38 am. Laura asked that we think about who is it that we are having this conversation for? If we are struggling for a particular thought that this has to be saved, we should think clearly on whether that need exists.

Laura gathered the group together at 10:58 and posed the question, “How do we approach this building?” It came to State ownership as real property. It came to the DHR for stewardship in its current condition as a collection of building pieces.

Thinking about for whom we are having this difficult conversation and do we need to have it? We had 45 comments with our first survey, and only three with the second. We have not had any phone calls or comments from the second meeting. There were a lot of people who said “do something” but not necessarily connected to a reconstruction, and there are people who have said we must reconstruct. We had a small number of people come to the Portsmouth meeting and even less to the Concord meeting. We have a majority of people who have not weighed in and possibly do not care. The discussion on why reconstruction is not a viable answer may need to be set aside as we look at the resource and who are the people we need to reach out to? Are we creating something out of nothing? Is the story being told elsewhere? What is the purpose?

Beth: The idea that the First State House is worth something drives this project. In terms of economic development, we have a resource that offers small economic impacts with a large price tag.

James: There are intangible values like civic pride, etc. The idea behind reconstruction has centered on just the reconstruction and not an analysis on what the benefits and risks are. The object is driving the project not the project driving the use of the object.

Blake: The crowd that came out was very vocal about what they felt about the object. Their clear understanding was that this resource was theirs and that the money should have gone to reconstructing the building in spite of the terms of the grant as a planning grant.

Beth: A section of the report should speak to the sense of loss. There is a sense of loss when things are removed or torn down in our communities. We have lost the First State House in Portsmouth; there is a reaction to that loss and a desire to bring it back with a reconstructed building.

Blake: Everyone needs to accept blame for that loss in an open and honest way. It is not to vilify anyone, but share responsibility. Everyone has a part in this loss and everyone can have a part of whatever comes out of the experience be it the story, the interpretation, etc.

Beth: Get the mourning over with and move to the next step.

Peter: The report will be written so that any citizen should be able to read it and see that it makes sense.

James: Have the studies brought new information to the decision-making process?
Consensus: yes. What should/could have been done in 1989/90 needs to be addressed today. Do we use it or recycle it? We can keep it in a trailer for the next 100 years, but what is the point? Why can't we create something that honors it, utilizes the research and documentation, etc?

What are the allowable consumptions? Does it have to be reversible? Could it be used as some sort of framework to hang panels that tell the story of the First State House – to tell the story in exhibit with physical elements? It needs to be done in a very artistic way.

Blake: We must have a space that can incorporate it, and if we do not use it all, we still have a storage problem.

Christine: If we use it like that then we are done with it as the object that it is and it becomes something new.

Beth: We have not discussed what the research value is of the collection.

Laura: What has been mentioned over the past few years is that the research value has been extrapolated from the collection.

Christine: Anything you could extract from future technology could be extracted from a standing building.

Laura: You could always continue to do research into the topics told by the resource, but the gathering of the building's history has been done. The documentation gathered can be the launching point for future research.

Peter: If you view it like an archaeological site, then "we've dug the site." The "archaeology" has been done.

Beth: Storage is not an issue for the State like it is for a museum.

It was asked if there was value to the resource beyond a small group of people.

John: Portsmouth had an opportunity to rally around this building and it did not happen.

Consensus: What we have is a collection, parts.

Consensus: Reconstruction is not viable or valuable. No reconstruction.

Considering the response to the surveys and meetings for the public, can the report say there was relatively low interest in the First State House?: Consensus of the group is yes, it can.

Consensus: Given current preservation practice and theory, we are not keeping the resource for its research value.

Laura: No financial aspect to the online survey, just whether or not there is value in the project and resource.

Beth: We need to make sure we are clear that historic structures have value and what makes this one different.

Christine: Good sound methods were followed when this building was excavated and documented with the historic structures report.

Blake: The architectural value, the historical value, etc, need to be addressed in the report. We need to show how many different ways to evaluate/assess value and how this one does not meet the criteria.

Beth: It is a collection of building parts and not a building.

Christine: Agreed, that is what they are.

The report needs to express what value has been extracted—what we did learn.

Beth: Looking at where the preservation field has gone over the last 100 plus years, there have been considerable changes in how we look at resources. In 100 more years, people will look at a resource differently from where we are now. A very conservative approach would be to look at using the resource without factoring out future possibilities for the resource.

Keeping the status quo would allow for future reconstruction, or not and foreclose on that option.

Reuse with no permanent damage?

Blake: Decisions are made in museum contexts that sometimes do damage to buildings but follow the philosophy of the time. We look at the past and see what we consider to be mistakes. Our generation has a chance to make their choices to do what they need to do based on the current philosophy, and future generations will judge what we do.

We have decided that there is no current research value in what we have, given preservation practice and theory, but something could be done with these materials in the future.

Peter: But, if we end up with stuff in a trailer that doesn't support the best use finding then have we done the project a disservice? Just keeping what supports the best use option shows a "moving forward" that gives the grant value.

Blake: What are the values and how do we express those?

Discussion was had on sentiment and value of resources and is there a value to keep everything or is there a value in making decisions for the resource based on what we know today?

James: How do we package the information and disseminate it to the public. Who will do this?

Beth: What stories can the State House tell? Whose mission does it fit with? Is it already being told, need already filled? Basic Colonial New Hampshire is being told: Portsmouth, Woodman Institute, NH State House, American Independence Museum; they haven't reached out or jumped onto the project.

Key Points reconfirmed:

Two points of consensus: Given current professional knowledge and practices we have exhausted the research opportunities. There has been limited public interest shown for the resource.

We have consensus that reconstruction is not a viable option from every known angle. We do not have a full building but just parts. We have looked at this option from a variety of criteria and the answer has been unanimous: No

There are no presently stated needs that can be matched with the resource today.

What is the best way to move forward? How will the State of New Hampshire decide to move forward with the collection?

Lunch was called from 12:20-12:50

There is a lack of interest within likely cultural institutions for the resource. Is this due to a perception that reconstruction is the only model? If there is some support from the State for the resource, will that help people take notice?

Laura: People from all over and a variety of organizations were invited to the meetings and conference call through direct e-mail. They have opted not to join/participate in the conversation.

Blake: That lack of interest from cultural institutions is “far more chilling” than a lack of interest from the general public.

James: Whatever is suggested at the end of the process, there is still a lot of variability in what the outcome will be. If it is an exhibit, it will need to be planned and designed. It is partially a chicken and an egg issue. Do we have enough material to get people excited about the project? If there is no interest, then what happens?

Establish some level of partnership, but without expectation from them for money.

Blake: If you pass the final recommendation to a select group of museum directors, etc, take reconstruction off the table, their reaction could tell us what the future hope for the project could be.

James: The later scenarios rely on some existing or a new organization. A new organization is not very likely. Taking what we have and shopping it around with decision points could help decide what road to go down. The educational scenarios evaluated could happen in many ways that could include a private/public partnership but it really all has to do with money. There's got to be a carrot for someone to want to engage in this project. Funding not likely. People have to see the value in it.

John: I do not see the value. It has been on the table for over ten years with no results.

Beth: What we were hoping for was that if not reconstruction, what is the highest and best use for this resource? We needed new thoughts to develop a vision for a new use. Is this something that the DHR can go forward with or something that we partner with a private group? We realize that nobody will take our report and push it forward without a willing public partner.

James: If we develop a plan we can meet with obvious partners to gauge interest to see how to move forward?

Beth: You can't ask for funds if you don't have a plan.

So what is the "best use" to open access to it?

If no interest > storage in perpetuity

If interest > is this story compelling enough for entities to take it on and incorporate into their programming?

James: NEH could have funds for programs and others that may have further grant opportunities to take one or three of these ideas and design an exhibit.

James: A permanent exhibit is likely not going to happen. If that is the case, then it has to be a traveling exhibition with a virtual part or totally virtual. An ongoing four person staff to support a traveling exhibit may or may not be needed to support the program.

Beth: What are the opportunities to use the materials in future exhibit?

Christine: You could take a part of the joinery, cut it down, and see how it all fits together.

Blake: It can be a hook to get people interested.

John: For funding: Why don't we look at what was proposed as plan A? This has to be sold to the State of NH. What happens if the State says no? What is Plan B? Other funders like NEH? If they say no, what is Plan C? It stays in the trailer? Do we think that there is enough meat to this to make it happen?

James: The next step is to shop it around to see what the interest in the resource would be? We are looking for a partner to help with the content and development and revenue raising to make it happen.

Beth: Is the best option for this resource one that does not need a tremendous amount of support? Whatever it is and whoever the partners are, it has to have a low operating cost.

John: The problem of what to do and period of history is not unique to the resource.

Christine: Can't there be a recommendation for this project. Lay out the best use and then determine who should be contacted to continue the process.

Peter: What about a possible partnership with current State House (gift shop room) and DRED (Wentworth Coolidge Mansion) to have permanent exhibits, orient people to those sites, and send people elsewhere.

2 permanent exhibits, small travelling exhibits, use as "visitor center;" after visiting the current State House, where are visitors directed next? Direct them to other state sites—economic development.

Frame "sculpture" exhibit at Manchester Airport, build interest.

Blake: State of Delaware has a model called the first state historic park that is shared by the state parks and historic resources people.

State partnerships: DHR, GSA/legislature, DRED, DTTD

James: Using the First State House to rehabilitate the interpretation of the current State House. Make it less about the State House and more about the state and its resources.

Blake: Using the resource to help meet current needs. Sometimes it is just a catalyst.

Beth: The new state tourism motto is out. "Live free and..." like live free and hike or hunt, or etc.

We have a new way to think about any of the scenarios. We need to connect the dots between the scenarios in the CVG report with our discussion. We'll need to explain how we got to this point in the final report.

Best Use Recommendation:

We have two proposals that we are suggesting to move forward in a phased approach:

- The Airport falls under "Scenario Three" in the CVG report. Exhibit within a large existing space.

The next phase of the project has three components and combines aspects of "Scenarios Four & Five" in the CVG report:

- Permanent exhibits possibly at the current State House & the Wentworth Coolidge Mansion
- Develop an online presence & use it and the exhibit as a catalyst to introduce people to the culture and heritage of New Hampshire and build awareness of other historic sites of the state.
- A traveling exhibit

The group took a break from 2:35-2:50

We need to bullet out how did we get to this idea.

What makes this viable and workable?

- It reaches a larger audience.
- Catalyst for tourism of NH's historic sites. FSH represents the beginning of history of state of NH, now we can use it to learn about history since.
- It is a shared need that would get multiple governmental agencies working together. It creates partnerships with other state agencies in building stewardship of state historic sites.
- It uses the materials in a logical way.
- It really works directly with New Hampshire's history. It is the First NH State House and we are continuing that historic connection with linking it with the current NH

State House and a resource that has a close connection to the building's original function. Also, a close connection with Benning Wentworth. It is a natural historical fit.

- It was developed with the idea that a visitor center exists in Portsmouth but in Concord visitors are possibly underserved.
- The Concord exhibit leverages the audience already visiting the NH State House and extends it. They are there for civics and connected to today. We have an opportunity to make the history of the FSH relevant to today.
- Catalyst of heritage tourism. Using this resource to bring attention to the State's own artifact collection and historical sites and local communities' as well.

We need to work with the NH Historical Society closely to insure we do not reproduce efforts.

Beth: Are there security issues that need to be addressed or materials issues that need to be considered like graffiti or vandalism, or souvenir hunting?

Security issues should be part of the plan.

To put it back together for an exhibit, it will take about 1,000 hours for conservation work, etc but does not include engineering, etc. (Christine estimate).

Next Steps to take this grant beyond this grant:

- Targeted contact: We need to discuss this with our proposed direct partners (state agencies, possibly Manchester Airport, Portsmouth Historical Society and others) to see what their thoughts are on the idea. (Without them we cannot go forward.) As things become clearer, we can start bringing other partners in as well.
- Narrow down focus: Through that targeted contact and their responses, we will be able to use the information to flush out what the different components could be, then we could begin program development.
- Programmatic schematics: Program development. This step could also be funded by grants, program planning grants such as NEH.
- Fundraising for implementation.

Blake: When museums undertake such a project, they are funded by a variety of pockets of money.

Other potential organizations for funding:

NH Charitable Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts
The State of NH
Kresge Foundation

NH Bar Association

Blake: We need to design program elements that talk to the future. Makes connections to relate the past with the present and uses modern technology. People want to develop their own thoughts and not have a curatorial voice of authority telling them what to do. People want to participate in the process.

The Meeting Adjourned at 3:20

Peter Michaud and Laura S. Black